

April
1892

THE
PARENTS' REVIEW:
A MONTHLY MAGAZINE
OF HOME-TRAINING AND CULTURE.

"EDUCATION IS AN ATMOSPHERE, A DISCIPLINE, A LIFE."—Matthew Arnold.

Editorial.

Here is a suggestive anecdote of the childhood of Mrs. Harrison, one of the pair of little Quaker maidens introduced to us in the "Autobiography of Mary Howitt," the better known of the sisters. "One day she found her way into a lumber room. There she caught sight of an old Bible, and turning over its yellow leaves she came upon words that she had not heard at the usual morning readings, the opening chapters of St. Luke—which her father objected to read aloud—and the closing chapter of Revelation. The exquisite picture of the Great Child's birth in the one chapter, and the beauty of the description of the New Jerusalem in the other, were seized upon by the eager little girl of six years old with a rapture which, she used to say, no novel in after years ever produced."

And this of a child of five from a letter of to-day. "The little ones read every day the events of Holy Week with me. Z. is inexpressibly interesting in his deep, reverent interest, almost *excitement*."

* * * * *
We are probably quite incapable of measuring the religious receptivity of children. Nevertheless, their fitness to apprehend the deep things of God is a fact with which we are called to "deal prudently," and to deal reverently. And that because,

L

as none can appreciate more fully than the "Darwinian," the attitude of thought and feeling in which you place a child is the vital factor in his education.

"Begin it, and the thing will be completed!" is infallibly true of every mental and moral habitude: completed, not on the lines you foresee and intend, but on the lines appropriate and necessary to that particular habitude. In the phrase "unconscious cerebration," we are brought face to face with the fact that, whatever seed of thought or feeling you implant in a child—whether through inheritance or by early training—grows, completes itself, and begets after its kind, even as a corporeal organism. It is a marvellous and beautiful thing to perceive an idea—when the idea itself is a fine one—developing within you of its own accord, to find your pen writing down sentences whose logical sequence delights you, and yet in the conception of which you have had no conscious part. When the experienced writer "reels off" in this fashion, he knows that, so far as the run of the words, the ordering of the ideas go, his work will need no revision. So fine a thing is this that the lingering fallacy of the infallible reason established itself thereupon. The philosopher, who takes pleasure in observing the ways of his own mind, is a thinker of high thoughts, and he is apt to forget that the thought which defiles a man behaves in precisely the same way as that which purifies the one, as the other, develops, matures, and increases after its kind.

* * * * *

How does this bear on the practical work of bringing up children? In this way: We think, *as we are accustomed to think*; ideas come and go and carry on a ceaseless traffic in the rut—let us call it—you have made for them in the very nerve substance of the brain. You do not deliberately intend to think these thoughts; you may, indeed, object strongly to the line they are taking (two "trains" of thought going on at one and the same time!) and, objecting, you may be able to barricade the way, to put up "No Road" in big letters, and to route. But who is able for these things? Not the child, immature of will, feeble in moral power, unused to the weapons of the spiritual warfare. He depends upon his parents; it rests with them to initiate the thoughts he shall think, the desires he

shall cherish, the feelings he shall allow. Only to initiate; no more is permitted to them; but from this initiation will result the habits of thought and feeling which govern the man—his *character*, that is to say. But is not this assuming too much, seeing that, to sum up roughly all we understand by heredity, a child is born with his future in his hands? The child is born, doubtless, with the tendencies which should shape his future; but every tendency has its branch roads, its good or evil outcome; and to put the child on the right track for the fulfilment of the possibilities inherent in *him*, is the vocation of the parent.

* * * * *

But religious training, and the Bible? It is so hard to know what to teach when everything is an "open question." Courage. Nothing is lost yet, and the future is for us. We yield, not the Scriptures, but one or other of the old canons of interpretation, as science shows it to be untenable; but we look her in the eyes and interrogate her sharply; and, above all, we are intolerant of the assumption of infallibility in a teacher who is ever smearing out with wet finger some lesson of yesterday, because it is not the truth of to-day. Are we not on the verge of a new criticism, not historical, and not natural, but *personal*? Is not physiology hurrying up with the announcement that to every man it is permitted to mould and modify his own brain? That, not heredity, and not environment, but education, is the final and the formative power? That *character* is the man, and education is the maker of character, howsoever much she owe her material to the other two.

* * * * *

And how should this affect our study of Holy Writ? By concentrating criticism upon the personages of the Bible rather than upon the recorded events. First upon the authors—known or unknown: the instruction in righteousness is not less or more, whether Moses or another, Isaiah or another, wrote the words. Is it in human nature, is it in the nature of *authors*, for a man to suppress himself as the authors here? Where do the little affectations and vanities of the man of letters crop up? Where are the turgid utterances, the egotistical, the bombastic? Even Plutarch, prince of biographers, cannot refrain himself; he gives you his opinion of his man, and illustrates it by

delightful anecdotes; but to set the man himself before you for judgment without a yea or a nay—not Plutarch or another has been able for this, least of all the biographers of to-day. Where, in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, of prophet, priest, or king, have we moral disquisitions? Is not rather the principle made plain all along the line that right and wrong are self-evidenced, calling for neither praise nor blame; unadorned straightforward narrative is enough when every man carries the judge in his bosom. And then the persons—how the springs of human action are laid bare, how they rise from out the sacred page, not a gallery of Hebrew portraits, but a procession of the living, more manifest than the people with whom you sit at table every day! Whence is this, if not by the inspiration of God? And how majestic do some of them take shape before us! How feeble are patriotism, enthusiasm, altruisms, all the fine words of to-day, to express the law-giver of Israel, the prophet, the poet, the leader of men, a man of like passions with ourselves, too, but how incapable of self! "*Moses, Moses, und immer Moses!*" Truly this one character is enough to stimulate us to the bringing up of godly and manly youth. And in what two or three wonderful touches have we set before us the education that made him. And all the time, no praises, never a story told for his exaltation, no more ever than the flow of lucid narrative showing only events in their course. Here is essential truth; here is a two-fold inspiration. First, to produce the man Moses; next, to portray him. Ah, but, the "evolution of history!" Truly, if man is to be measured by the heaped up praises of his biographers, every year we produce many, not only greater than Moses, but greater than Christ! When does biography issue from the press so free of laudations as are the four evangels? O, "the sweet reasonableness of Christianity!" the most sober sanity of that great company elected to hand over to us the counsels of God.



On the Teaching of Religion to Children.

That religion should have survived the unhappy methods in which it has been too frequently taught, is surely a testimony to the indestructibility of the religious instinct. That the tyranny, the repression, the perpetual prohibition, the conventionality, the dulness, and the gloom which have done duty for religious education in many a household, have not produced some wide and deep reaction against religion is surely wonderful. Perhaps, indeed, they have wrought such reaction, though we do not usually reckon it among the great anti-religious forces of our time. Perhaps more scoffing and scepticism are due to this cause than we fancy; perhaps more characters than we wot of have been hardened and degraded by revolt from the religious associations of childhood.

Compulsory Catechism, without any garment of life and colour thrown over its chill outlines; compulsory Bible-readings, without loving comment, or, worse still, Bible-passages set to be learnt as punishments, on the principle of turning the very Gospel itself into a kind of premonitory hell; Sundays of inexpressible weariness, and of perfectly unreasonable prohibitions, in which were blended the Sabbath not of Moses but of the Pharisees, English Puritanism, and a confusion of mind between respectability and religion—fatal Sundays, which rode in the procession of the days of the week as a hearse among wedding-coaches—that some of us should have endured these things and still find the springs of religion unbroken within us, is surely a notable thing. It is a witness that religion, like hope, "springs eternal in the human breast."

And because this is so, because religion is an essential part of human nature, therefore it must be a part of any sensible scheme of education. There are persons who talk as though it were an "optional subject," like Spanish or Italian, as though it